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AUTHOR Knox, Pamela L.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

One way in which theorists have attempted to understand the differences in identity and attitudes of minority groups, and more recently majority groups, has been through theories of racial identity development. In this study factor analysis was applied to J. E. Helms' models of racial identity development: the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale, Form B (RIAS-B), and the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS). The responses of two samples (N=363; 203 Black and 160 White undergraduate students) were analyzed in order to investigate whether stage scores displayed the structure expected of variables that measure a hierarchical, developmental sequence. Characteristics expected of developmental models include the display of a simplex-like structure in the intercorrelations of stage scores and the factor loadings for stage scores approximating a two-factor semicircular configuration with variables ordered by stage along a semicircle. The pattern of the RIAS-B scores appeared to approximate the developmental stage structure requirements with a reversal of the Disintegration and Reintegrations scales. Unlike the RIAS-B, the stage scores for the WRIAS failed to demonstrate a developmental stage order. Defining racial identity via developmental stage models would appear to merit reconsideration. Four tables and six graphs present hypotheses and analysis. Contains 37 references. (Author/LSR)

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Running Head: RACIAL IDENTITY STAGES

Racial Identity: Refuting the Developmental "Stage" Structure

Pamela L. Knox

Tennessee State University

James W. Lichtenberg

The University of Kansas

Donna Moore & Bettina Jones

Tennessee State University

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Correspondence concerning this paper should be directed to Pamela L. Knox, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, Tennesse State University, 3500 John A. Merritt Blvd, Nashville, TN 37209. Electronic mail may be sent via Internet to PKNOX@PICARD.TNSTATE.EDU

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Racial Identity: Refuting the Developmental "Stage" Structure

Abstract

Factor analysis was applied to Helm's models of racial identity development (RAIS-B and WRAIS). The responses of two samples (N =363; 203 Black and 160 White undergraduate students) were analyzed in order to investigate whether stage scores displayed the structure expected of variables that measure a hierarchical, developmental sequence. Characteristics expected of developmental models include: (a) the display of a simplexlike structure in the intercorrelations of stage scores and (b) the factor loadings for stage scores approximating a two-factor semicircular configuration with variables ordered by stage along a semicircle. The pattern of the RIAS-B scores appeared to approximate the developmental stage structure requirements with a reversal of the Disintegration and Reintegration scales. Unlike the RIAS-B, the stage scores for the WRIAS failed to demonstrate a developmental stage order. Defining racial identity via developmental stage models would appear to merit reconsideration.

Racial Identity: Refuting the Developmental "Stage" Structure

One way in which theorists have attempted to understand the differences in identity and attitudes of minority groups, and more recently majority groups, has been through theories of racial identity development (e.g., Arce, 1981; Bennett, Behrans, & Rowe, 1993; Helms, 1990; Kim, 1981; Ruiz, 1990). Racial identity development according to Helms (1990) is a multidimensional construct referring to how a person feels, thinks, and behaves in relation to the self and others both within and outside of one's own racial group. First proposed by Cross (1978) as a model of psychological adult developmental experiences and operationalized by Helms, Carter and Parham 's Black and White racial attitude and identity scales (RIAS-B, Parham & Helms, 1981; WRIAS, Helms & Carter, 1990), racial identity development models assert a stage sequence in which persons progress in their racial identity development from lower to higher stages through a series of changes in their racial attitudes --both with regard to their own race, as well as in regard to other races. Cross et al. (1991) delineated a common set of assumptions regarding the identity change process. The assumptions are: (a) racial identity development is a sequential stage progression; (b) individuals move from one stage to another in reaction to the individual's response to social oppression; and (c) the developmental progression through the stages represents an attitudinal shift from negative to positive self-preceptions. An integral component of racial identity theory is that one's identification with the "larger" group is tempered by how the person internalizes racism and oppression. Parham and Helms (1985) proposed that racial identity development be viewed as a continuous variable similar to attitude rather than as discrete stages as originally proposed. They stated that Black persons may hold values and beliefs associated with various stages simultaneously and that the amount or strength of these attitudes may vary. They also suggested that an individual does not progress necessarily through all stages. Helms (1990) proposed that racial identity development occurs in response to a variety of factors including family attitudes, physical characteristics, self-perceptions, and socialization.

Little research had examined the racial identity development of the majority culture in this country, e.g., White culture, until Helms (1984) provided a linear conceptual model, parallel to her model of Black

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racial identity, of how Whites might develop racial identity or consciousness. More recently, how they experience themselves in terms of race and how their racial self-definition affects their perceptions and attitudes of Blacks has become a major research focus.

The basic assumption underlying Helms's model of White racial identity development is that how a White person responds to Blacks may depend on how the White person has resolved his or her own racial issues. She states that for Whites to develop a healthy racial identity they must accept their Whiteness, its cultural implications, and its myth of superiority. This is theorized to occur between pseudo-independence and autonomy. Helms (1992) recommended that racial identity stages be viewed as levels of individual complexity, with each successive stage representing more sophisticated views of one's own racial characteristics and those of other racial groups. Helms proposed that racial identity development can be divided into two phases: (a) abandonment of racism (represented by the stages of contact disintegration, and reintegration), and (b) definition of a positive White identity (represented by pseudo-independence, immersion/emersion, and autonomy stages). Each stage of racial identity is determined both by the individual's cognitive processes, i.e., personal identity, and the quality of the racial environment in which the person interacts (Helms, 1984) and is present potentially in each person. Helms purports that the stages that are most consistent with the individual's personal environment and can be acknowledged cognitively mature fastest, are the most stable, and influence the majority of the individual's behaviors. Helms further hypothesized that positive progression through the stages is associated with better cross-racial interactions and a better personal adjustment.

The evidence that has been offered in support of validity of the RIAS-B and WRIAS as measures of racial identity development has rested primarily on the generally accepted content validity of the instruments (i.e., the item content of the various scales of the instrument appearing to be a reasonable reflection of the racial attitudes of each of Cross's racial identity development stages) and on empirical correlations found between various scale scores on the instruments and other related topics, e.g., counseling process, racial consciousness, racism, counselor preference, gender, age, counselor training (Carter, 1990a, 1990b; Claney & Parker, 1989; Corvin & Wiggins, 1989; Helms, 1990; Helms & Carter, 1991; Pope-Davis and Ottavi , 1994; Ponterotto, 1988; Sabnani, Ponteratto, & Borodovsky, 1991). Much debate exists as to the adequacy of the existing racial identity models. Rowe, Bennett, and

Atkinson (1994) have stated that they reject the notion that White Racial Identity Development is developmental because the existing models fail to confirm to certain developmental adequacy criteria (e.g., temporality, cumulativity, directionality, new mode of organization, increased capacity of self-control). They suggested in a general critique of White Racial Identity Development models (including Helms's model) that only groups of white people who share common attitudes are described and this in itself does not reflect stages of identity development. Rowe and Atkinson (1995) have questioned the usefulness of a developmental perspective when the order of progression is anticipated as including forward, backward and fixation. In a recent test of stability and construct validity, Lemon and Waehler (1996) found that racial identity as measured by the RIAS-B or the WRIAS may be more indicative of state rather than trait characteristics. Helms (1985) noted that in a multidimensional scaling of the RIAS, the Encounter items, unlike the other stage items, did not demonstrate a clear, definitive pattern. Parham and Helms (1985a, 1985b) found similarities in the patterns of relationships associated with the first and third stages. Both were positively related to feelings of inferiority and anxiety (Parham & Helms, 1985b) and negatively related to self-esteem (Parham & Helms,1985a) and self-actualization (Parham & Helms, 1985b).

Stevenson (1995), in his application of the Nigrescence model to adolescence, found that the factors of the RIAS suggest that the stages of Preencounter, Immersion and Internalization relate to one another in ways that are consistent with a continuous as opposed to an orthogonal model. Minimal support for the disjunctive argument was found with independence of Preencounter and Immersion stages, the inverse between Encounter and Internalization stages, and a positive relationship between Immersion and Internalization stages. This suggests racial identity is both a stagewise process and also levels of consciousness. Ponterotto and Wise (1987) supported the underlying factor structure of the RIAS Pre-encounter, Immersion/emersion, and Internalization stages but not the Encounter stage. Ponterotto et al. point out that leaping from the Pre-encounter stage to the Immersion /Emersion stage doe not pragmatically make sense. They suggested that perhaps the Encounter stage is really a transition rather that a stage. Initial psychometric analyses of the WRIAS (Alexander, 1992; Bennett, Behrens & Rowe, 1993; Rowe, Behrens & Leach, 1995; Tokar & Swanson, 1991) have not supported the internal and convergent validity or the factor analytic structure.

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Given their popularity and significant use in current research on racial identity and attitudes, whether the instruments themselves function psychometrically in the hierarchical and developmental fashion presumed by the developers is worthy of testing. Wohlwill (1973) proposed applying what he calls a "disjunctive" scaling technique to moral judgment data in order to obtain evidence on the sequentiality of Kohlberg's (1969) developmental stages of moral development. In the present paper, we applied a similar technique to test the hierarchical and developmental character of the RIAS-B and WRIAS.

As Wohlwill (1973) applies the term to developmental research, a set of responses is said to form a disjunctive scale if "each behavior, as it appears, displaces the preceding one" (p. 104). Cross's (1971, 1978) stages of racial development can be said to be a disjunctive scale if, as development proceeds, identity and attitudes characterizing lower stages of development successively are replaced by the attitudes of higher stages. Although this view certainly seems to characterize Cross' s model of racial identity development, it is not altogether clear that this assumption characterizes either the RIAS-B or WRIAS. According to Helms (1990), it apparently is possible for individuals to receive high (or low) scores on each of the several stage scales of the instruments. This has led Helms to adopt a configural or profile interpretation of the scales, rather than designating a person's racial development stage on the basis of highest score among the instruments' scales. Nevertheless, as measures of racial identity development, the scales of the RIAS-B and WRIAS ought to conform reasonably to the hierarchical and sequential structure of Cross's (1971, 1978) developmental model that they were designed to reflect (as opposed to simply measures of disparate racial attitudes). That is, as one's racial identity develops, the views and attitudes characterizing earlier developmental stages should give way to higher stages of racial identity development.

For purposes of this study, the various racial identity stage scales of RIAS-B and WRIAS were considered reflective of a disjunctive, developmental scale if (a) the stage scales were hierarchically ordered along a single developmental sequence and (b) each stage scale is related to that sequence by a single-peaked, nonmonotone function -- that is each stage scale at first tends to increase in strength (frequency) as it is replaced by subsequent stages (scales) in the hierarchy. The stages of interest in this study were the different RIAS-B and WRIAS racial attitude scales associated with Cross's stages of racial identity development.

Figure 1 depicts the kinds of nonmonotone function that might be assumed to relate the ordered sequence of racial identity development stages to age when the stages are part of a disjunctive developmental scale (Davison, Robbins, & Swanson, 1978).

Insert Figure 1 about here.

In testing the RIAS-B and WRIAS as measures of racial identity development, we have assumed:

(a) the stage scores are expressed on an interval scale,

(b) both individuals and stage score variables can be assigned scale values on an underlying continuum, and

(c) a person's highest racial identity attitude score is the stage whose level of maturation best characterizes the person's racial development stage.

Several predictions derive from these assumptions:

1. The correlations of the racial identity stage scores should display a simplexlike structure. That is, adjacent stages of racial development should be structurally more similar than the attitudes of nonadjacent stages. To test this prediction, one orders the rows and columns of the correlation matrix so that the first row and column correspond to the first stage score, the second row and column correspond to the second stage score, and so on. So arranged, the correlations should display the distinctive simplexlike structure in which the correlations in any row consistently decrease as one moves away from the diagonal element in either direction.

2. A principle components factoring of the variable correlations should yield two factors. The two-factor space should contain one factor along which intermediate stages have the highest loading. Along another factor, variable loadings should be arrayed in stage order. Along this factor, the first stage should have the lowest loadings, the second stage should have the second lowest loading, the third stage should have the third lowest loading, etc. If the two-factor loadings are plotted, the points representing variables should fall along a semicircle in a stage order (see Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here.

Method

The data reported in this study were obtained from two subject samples. A sample of Black students (N =203) was used to test the RIAS-B (Helms & Parham, 1981) as a measure of Black racial attitudes and identity development. Of this sample, 45 (22%) were males and 156 (78%) were females. Two students (<1%) did not specify their gender. The average age of this group was 23.14 (SD=6.37). All were currently enrolled students at a major predominantly Black urban university in the south. A sample of White students (N =180) was used to test the WRIAS (Helms & Carter, 1990) as a measure of White racial attitudes and identity. Of this sample, 45 (28%) were male and 115 (72%) were female. These students attended the same predominantly Black urban university as the students in the Black sample.

Procedure

Subjects responded to demographic information in addition to a racial identity scale, either the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS-B) or White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS), based on self-identified racial classification.

Instruments

Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS-B). The RIAS-B (Parham & Helms, 1981) consists of 50 self-report items originally designed to measure the racial identity attitudes of Cross (1971). Cross's (1971, 1978) theory was operationalized by Parham and Helms (1981) in a study of Black students preferences for Black and White counselors. Briefly Cross's card sort descriptive items were transformed into attitudinal items defined by Parham and Helms to reflect stages of racial identity development or beliefs or attitudes about their own race. These stages are: (a) *Preencounter*, Blackness is devalued and Whiteness is idealized (b) *Encounter*, a tumultuous, brief transition from abandoning one's valuing of "White identity" and a quest for a different interpretation of Black identity; (c) *Immersion/Emersion*, the

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highly emotional idealization and glorification of Blacks and Black culture and the denigration and potential hostility toward anything White; (d) and *Internalization*, the objective internalization of a positive identity and acceptance of others on the basis of world view, values and shared interests rather than on the basis of race. Cross's fifth stage, Internalization/Commitment, a political involvement to remove oppression regardless of its source, is not operationalized according to Parham and Helms (1985) due to the fine distinctions between behavior and attitudinal orientation.

Subjects responded to the items of the RIAS-B using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) to describe themselves. The scored responses produce a five score profile. Each of the five stage scales is measures with 10 items. Total stage scale scores may range from 0 to 50 with items left blank scored as zeros in the total, with higher scores indicating higher levels of attitudes characterized by that stage of development. Helms and Parham (1981) report internal consistency reliabilities of .76, .51, .68, and .79 for the respective stages of Preencounter ,Encounter, Immersion/Emersion, and Internalization. Construct and criterion validity studies are also reported by Helms and Parham.

*White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (*WRIAS). The WRIAS (Helms & Carter, 1990) consists of 50 self-report items to assess attitudes reflected in the five discrete stages of White racial identity development proposed by Helms (1984). Her original model consists of five stages through which an individual may progress: (a) *Contact*, colorblindness or cultureless perspective where the individual is oblivious to Whiteness and naive about Blackness, (b) *Disintegration*, marginal awareness of racism and discomfort with both Blackness and Whiteness, (c) *Reintegration* , idealization of Whiteness and devaluing of Blackness, (d) *Pseudo-Independence* , internalized acceptance of Whiteness, intellectualized acceptance of Blackness with the solution being that Blacks need to change; and (e) *Autonomy*, internalized acceptance and valuing of Blackness and of being White without maintaining a racist view. In 1990, Helms expanded her model to include a sixth stage, *Immersion/Emersion*, occuring between Pseudo-intellectualization and Autonomy, in which the individual seeks out what it means to be White. For the purposes of this study, no attempt was made in this study to incorporate the Immersion/Emersion stage.

Subjects respond to the items of the WRIAS using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from

strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) to describe themselves. Each of the five subscales is measured with 10 items. Total subscale scores may range from 0 to 50 with items left blank scored as zeros in the total. Helms and Carter (1990) report Cronbach's alpha-coefficients ranging from .53 to .67, .75 to .77, .75 to .82, .62 to .77, and .65 to .74 for the WRIAS scales of Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Pseudo-independence and Autonomy respectively and evidence of criterion-related reliability and construct validity supporting Helms's (1984) theory.

Analysis

Construct validation of the RIAS-B and WRIAS as developmental measures of racial identity were conducted separately. Each consisted of three parts: (a) First, the correlation matrix of the subjects' stage scores on each instruments was organized according to the procedure outlined earlier; i.e., so that the rows and columns were ordered by developmental stage. This allowed for determination of whether the scale scores evidenced the simplexlike structure. (b) Second, a principle components factor analysis was conducted. As suggested above, such an analysis should produce two factors with a particular factor structure and arrangement. (c) Finally, we plotted the stage scale scores by age in order to examine whether these scores displayed a single nonmonotone function.

Results

Simplexlike structure:

Tables 1 & 2 give the intercorrelations of th RAIS-B and the WRIAS scales, respectively. As one moves away from the diagonal in any row, either right or left, the values should decrease if no violation of a simplex pattern exists. These correlation matrices for the RIAS-B aand WRIAS, however, failed to reveal the expected simplexlike structure in the order of the stage variables.

Insert Tables 1 & 2 about here.

Principle Components factor analysis:

The separate factor analyses of the RIAS-B and WRIAS each revealed a two-factor structure. For

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the RIAS-B consistent with the predictions, the intermediate stages (Encounter, Immersion) showed the largest factor loadings (see Table 3). Based on the rotated loadings, Factor 1 is made up of the Encounter and Immersion scales, and Factor 2 is made up of the Internalization and Preencounter scales. Along the second factor, the stage scores of the RAIS, if connected by a smooth curve arranged themselves in roughly a semi-circular stage order (see Figure 2) with a reversal of stages 2 and 3.

As with the RIAS-B, the intermediate stages (Disintegration, Reintegration, Pseudo-Independence) of the WRIAS had larger factor loadings than did the developmental stage extremes (Contact, Autonomy) (see Table 4). Based on the rotated loadings, Factor 1 is made up of the Disintegration and Reintegration scales, and Factor 2 is made up of the Contact, Autonomy and Pseudo-intellectualization scales. Unlike the RIAS-B, however, the stage scores of the WRIAS failed to arrange themselves in a semi-circular stage order (see Figure 3).

Insert Tables 3 & 4 about here.

Insert Figures 3 & 4 about here.

Monotone function:

Both the RIAS-B and WRIAS failed to show the single monotone function described by Davison, Robbins, and Swanson (1978) (see Figure 1). Across developmental age, there was no evidence that racial identity and attitude stage scores showed a predicted pattern of score increases and decreases that would characterize a disjunctive developmental scale (see Figure 5 & 6).

Insert Figures 5 & 6 about here.

Discussion

Despite their widespread use as measures of racial identity development and numerous previous

findings of scale correlations with certain significant social and personal characteristics, the present psychometric analysis of the RIAS-B and WRIAS offered only partial confirmation that either instrument functions as the developmental measure it was apparently intended to be.

Helms (1989) argued that as stages of racial identity development are assumed to be continuous, scores on measures of the stages are likely to be correlated, so long as the "right" stages correlate in directions consistent with the theory and are not correlated so highly as to suggest redundancy. Whereas the subscale correlations of the RIAS and the WRIAS intercorrelations in this study suggest the "right" scales correlated in the right direction (with some reversals in the RIAS), some of the intercorrelations do suggest redundancy.

Perhaps one of the difficulties in using these instruments to describe racial identity development lies in the multidimensionality of racial identity. These instruments tap into attitudes but fail to consider the interactions of behaviors, emotions and thoughts in the developmental process. Parham (1989a,1989b) purposed the need to examine the relationship between racial identity attitudes and the experienced developmental tasks of adulthood. In a replication of the Carter (1990b) study, Pope-Davis and Ottavi (1994) found that men were more confused about racial identity than women or older students and had more difficulty with racial interactions and issues. Tokar and Swanson (1991) proposed exploring attitudinal and nonattitudinal components of identity development as new methodologies evolve. Based upon Helms and Piper's (1994) shift from describing racial identity development in terms of stages but rather as ego statuses, it would appear that even the developer of these instruments is questioning their structure.

Based on the findings of this study, we would have to concur with Sabnani et al. (1991) and Plummer (1995). From "an empirical standpoint,...we are at an infancy stage in terms of testing and fully understanding models of White racial-consciousness development" (Sabnani et al. ,1991; p.94) and in dire need of more current models of Black identity attitudes which would perhaps speak more sucessfully to the racial sophistication and potentially differing developmental stages experienced by today's Black population (Plummer ,1995).

Limitations:

1. Subjects were all college students (age range for the RIAS-B was 17 - 54; age range for the WRIAS was 18-70). Given the age range, it is likely that to a large extent racial identity development may have progressed to the point where attitudinal and identity development may not be especially apparent. That is, much of the change in racial attitudes and identity may already have occurred in the subjects. In this regard, although variations across the age range represented by the two samples was apparent, the overall elevation of the subjects' scores on each of the various stage scales was fairly flat -- there was no apparent increase and subsequent decrease in the strength of various "stage appropriate" racial attitudes as those attitudes may have risen in prominence and then in time were replaced by other attitudes that were developmentally higher.
2. The samples were of college students at a predominantly Black urban university, and thus may have reflected a rather "developed" or sophisticated and stable level of racial identity and racial attitudes.
3. Given the Southern location of the university used in this study, the subjects' life experiences as suggested by Parham and Williams (1993) may have influenced the level of racial identity development in sample although higher than expected Pre-encounter scores in the RIAS-B were not found.

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Table 1. Stage score correlations for RIAS-B.

Stage	Preencounter	Encounter	Immersion/Emersion	Internalization
Preencounter	-			
Encounter	.10	-		
Immersion/ Emersion	.18	.48	-	
Internalization	-.34	.30	.06	-

Table 2. Stage score correlations for WRIAS.

Stage	Contact	Disintegration	Reintegration	Pseudo-Independence	Autonomy
Contact	-				
Disintegration	-.13	-			
Reintegration	-.12	.76	-		
Pseudo-Independence	.43	-.46	-.42	-	
Autonomy	.37	-.34	-.35	.61	-

Table 3. Factor loadings for RIAS-B scale scores.

	ROTATED LOADINGS	
STAGE	FACTOR 1	FACTOR 2
ENCOUNTER	.86	.16
IMMERSION/ EMMERSION	.82	-.14
INTERNALIZATION	.31	.82
PREENCOUNTER	.28	-.81

Table 4. Factor loadings for WRIAS scale scores.

	ROTATED LOADINGS	
STAGE	FACTOR 1	FACTOR 2
DISINTEGRATION	.91	-.16
REINTEGRATION	.91	-.14
CONTACT	.10	.83
AUTONOMY	-.31	.75
PSEUDO-INDEPENDENCE	-.42	.75

Racial Identity Stages

Figure 1. Expected observed response strength (scale score) for five racial identity and attitude scales as a function of the respondent's position along the developmental dimension (development age) presumed to underly the disjunctive scale formed by the scales of the RIAS-B/WRIAS.

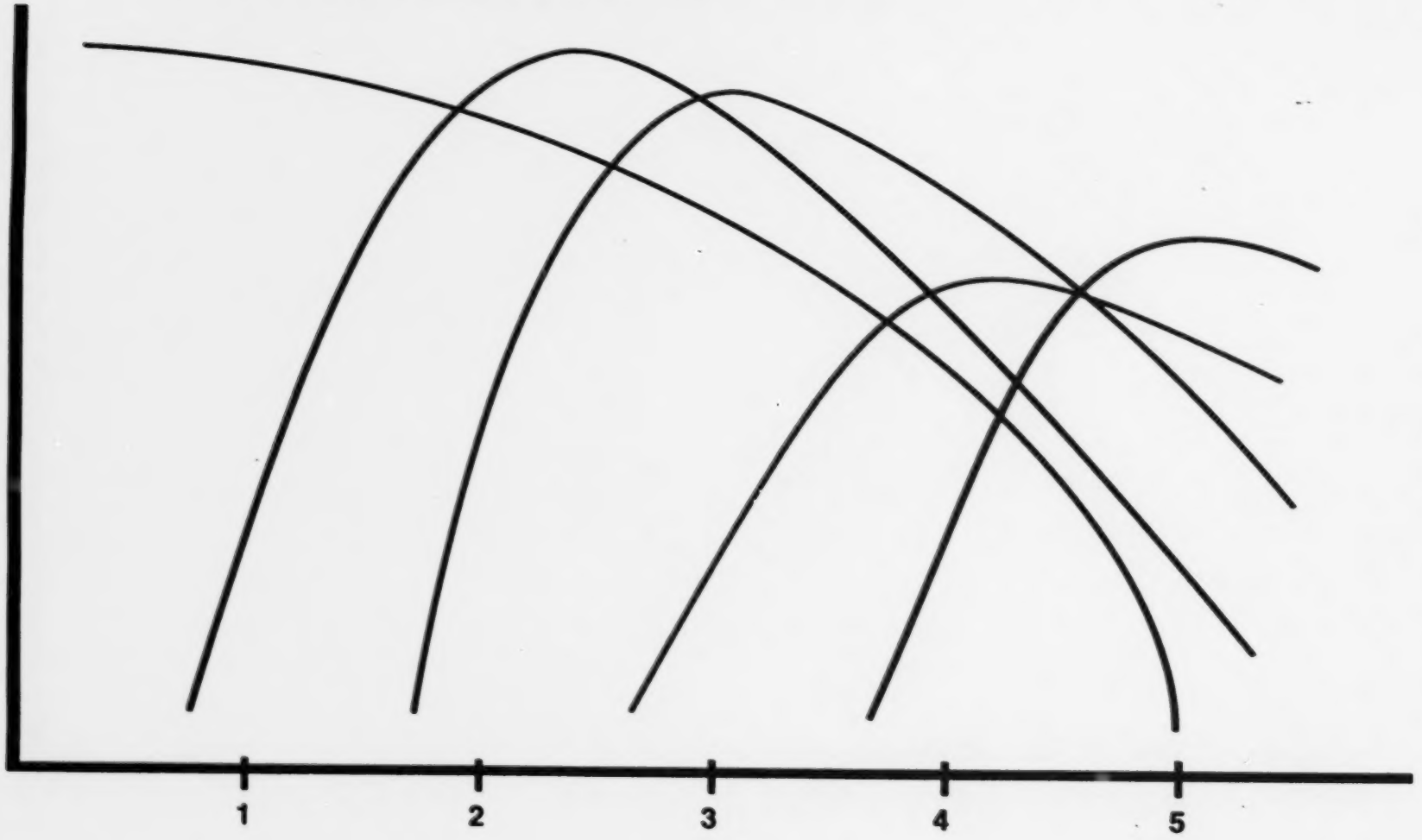


Figure 2. Hypothesized WRIAS stage score factor loadings. (If the points were connected by a smooth curve, that curve would be concave with respect to the origin and would approximate a semicircle. Points would generally fall along that curve in stage order.)

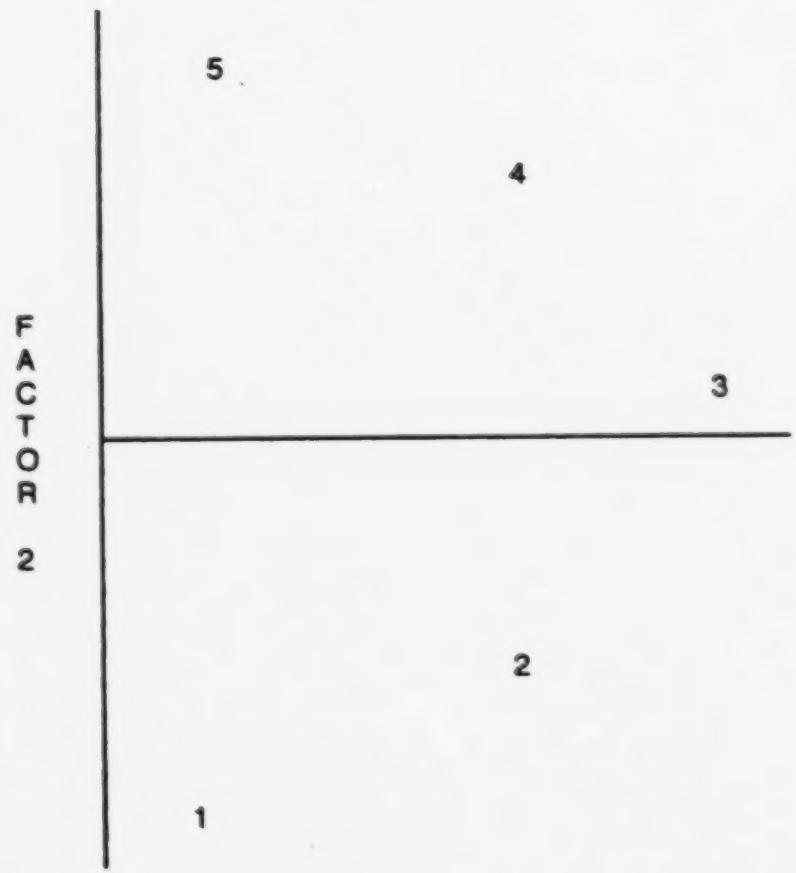
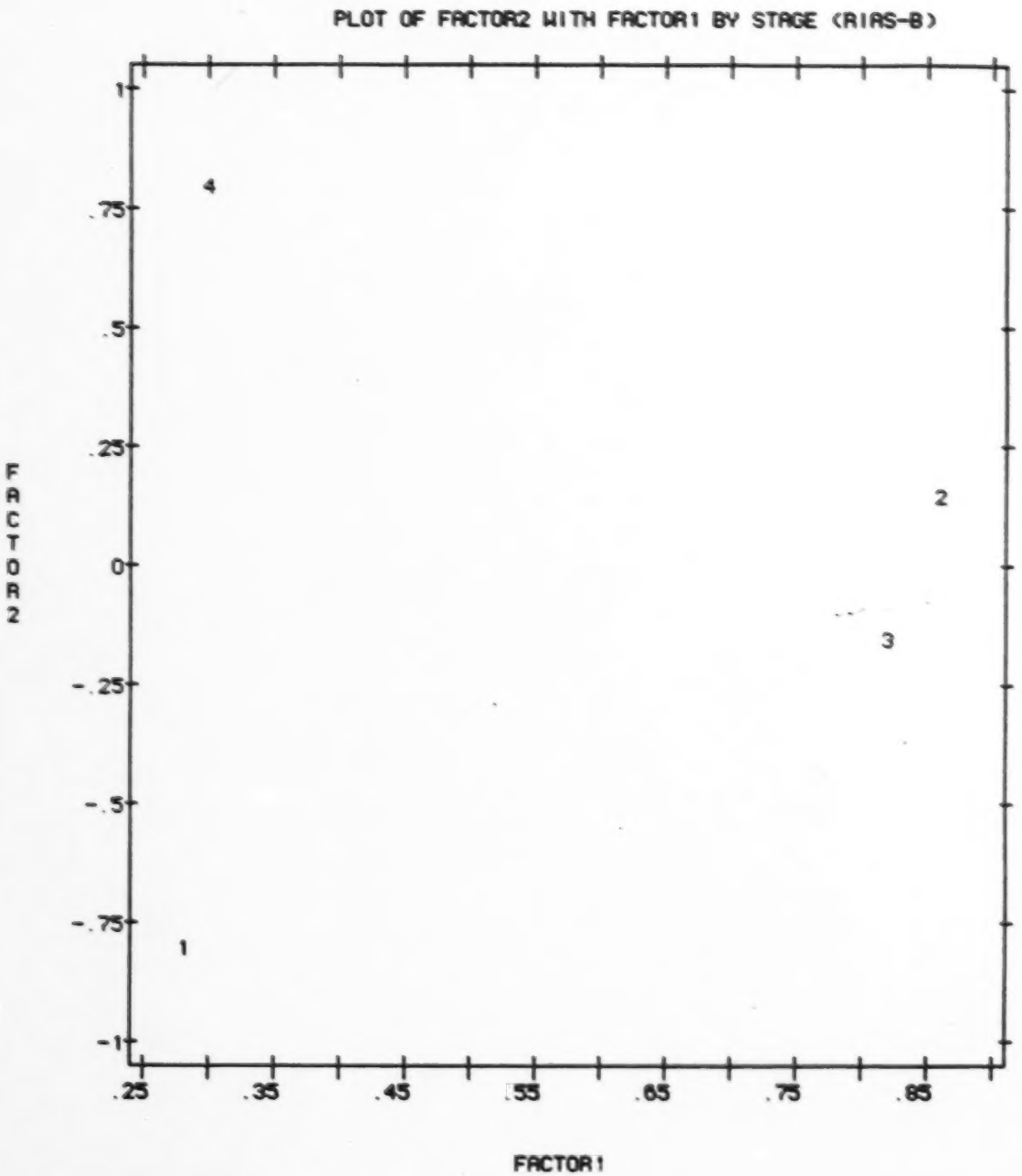
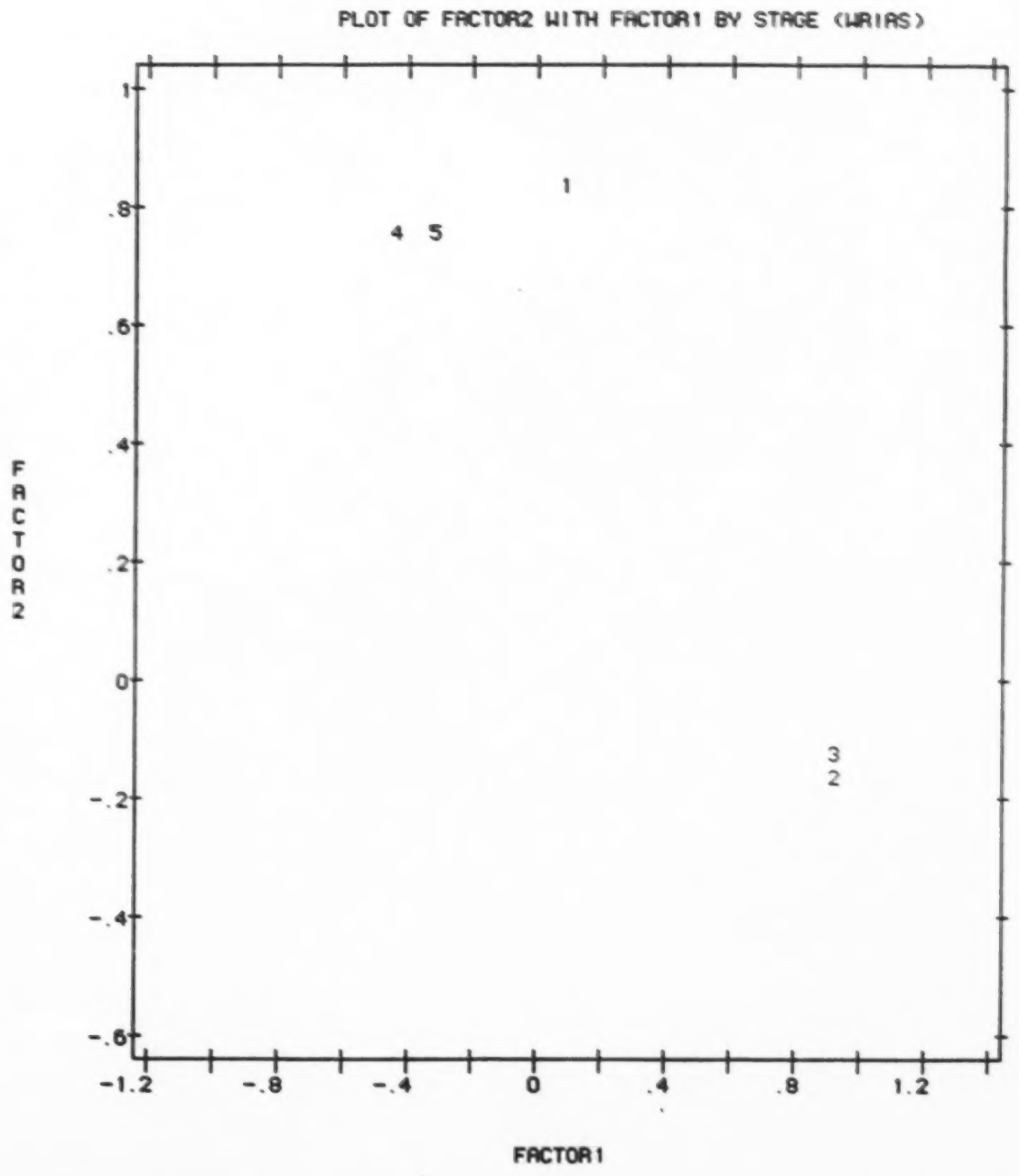


Figure 3. Stage score factor loadings for RIAS-B.



4 stages plotted.
First digit of STAGE is used as the plotting symbol.

Figure 4. Stage score factor loadings for WRIAS.



5 stages plotted.
First digit of STAGE is used as the plotting symbol.

Figure 5. RIAS-B scale scores by age

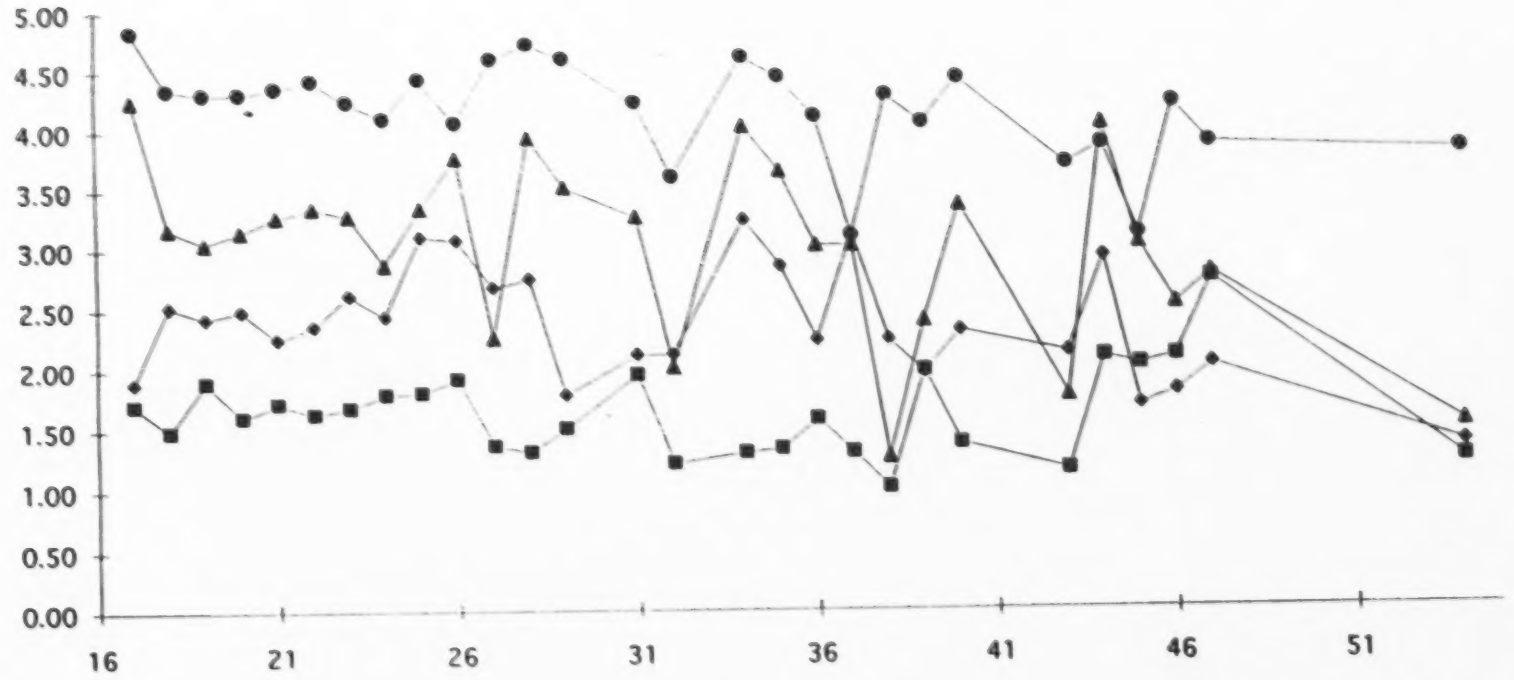


Figure 6. WRIAS scale scores by age